



Salton Sea Management Program

10-Year Plan Committee Meeting Summary

Held November 13, 2018 – Coachella

Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute

Meeting in Brief

The 10-Year Committee goals and objectives document captures statutory requirements and the Committee's recommendations to guide implementation of the 10-Year plan.

The state continues to coordinate with other regulatory agencies and stakeholders on SSMP planning and implementation, exploring both long-term and short-term opportunities. Due to SSMP implementation delays, the state and partners have been exploring what activities can move forward in the near future (e.g., permitted actions, property access, cost-effective, etc.) in support of dust management and habitat. The state is also developing a supplemental document to permit the entire 10-Year Plan to assist implementation going forward.

Proposed work for the Species Conservation Habitat project includes combining New River West, East, etc. into a single project area and conducting dust suppression on a Bureau of Land Management parcel as an interim measure. Exploration of conceptual designs for the North Lake / Whitewater project is currently underway; several entities have submitted comments on the various project alternatives.

Imperial Irrigation District continues to implement its air quality / dust control projects and is exploring a potential dust control + vegetation enhancement test well project. All documents and data are available on its [website](#).

Avian and fish monitoring data indicate increased salinity and reduced freshwater flow may be indirectly reducing the fish community and birds present in the sea. The Science Committee will discuss a potential state-monitoring program for fish and birds to complement other ongoing monitoring (e.g., public health), and provide recommendations to the 10-Year Committee.

The 10-Year Plan Committee and the Engagement Committee held a joint discussion on SSMP project planning updates and opportunities to improve engagement.

[Click here](#) for link to meeting materials and presentations.

Action Items

Nov/Dec	Vivien, Bruce, CBI	Coordinate with Genevieve for her to potentially join SSMP coordination calls.
Early 2019	Science Committee	Discuss potential state monitoring plan for fish and birds and develop recommendations to report back to the 10-Year Committee.

MEETING SUMMARY

Refined SSMP Goals and Objectives

Based on input from the Committee at its June meeting, several Committee members refined the proposed language for the [SSMP goals, objectives, and milestones](#). The revised document compiles all existing statutory language and the Committee's recommendations to guide implementation of the 10-Year plan.

Committee members and other attendees did not share any comments on this item.

State Updates

Staffing

Arturo Delgado is the new CA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) state liaison supporting the SSMP. CA Dept. of Water Resources (DWR) will hire three program managers and two engineers who will work solely on the SSMP; another engineer new-hire will spend 50% of the time on the SSMP. Other new state staff include administrative personnel and an attorney from the state legal office.

Army Corps Permit Status

The state is also developing a supplemental document to the Army Corps permit to cover the entire 10-Year Plan to assist implementation going forward. The state will keep the Committee updated on document development to help ensure it contains a comprehensive analysis of potential future impacts of the 10-Year Plan. The Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) project is already permitted; this permit intends to cover the other projects under the 10-Year Plan.

Updated 10-Year Plan documents

An updated version of the 10-Year Plan and associated costing report are on the website. These two documents eventually will be combined and intended to be updated annually.

Proposed Dust Control Projects

State Approach

Due to SSMP implementation delays for various reasons (discussed at the previous meeting) the state and partners have been considering near-term activities that could move forward while they continue to address longer-term efforts. For dust mitigation, they are exploring how to permit activities, identifying suitable sites and the need, and determining the appropriate methods for each site. The state wishes to expand its partnerships with property owners / land managers around the sea like the US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) and State Parks. Genevieve Johnson, USBR, also encouraged Committee members and partners to notify her of potential projects and costs to maximize coordination and funding coming to the Salton Sea.

Species Conservation Habitat Area – Proposed Dust Control for Parcel 10

One proposed dust control project entails surface roughening / tilling in Parcel 10 owned by US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the SCH project area. The state identified this parcel as highly emissive and suitable for tilling as an interim measure (approximately five years) until habitat enhancement can occur. This would not “double count” towards both the dust control and habitat acreage requirements. The state would work with BLM and Imperial Irrigation District (IID, who

owns the neighboring parcels) to optimize available resources and ensure activities are effective across the whole project area with the long-term project objectives in mind. This would use the Salton Sea Joint Powers Authority (JPA) dust mitigation funding, estimated to cost \$125,000 for implementation and monitoring. IID noted that this action aims to proactively avoid dust problems increasing and triggering regulatory action that requires Best Available Control Measures (BACM), which are significantly more costly.

Committee members expressed support for implementing something sooner rather than later; however, a few shared concerns that tilling could reduce the prime habitat area for enhancement. The group discussed the viability of other options, such as building a berm and flooding the area. The state and consultant TetraTech explained this might hinder future equipment access for habitat work, and there may be selenium concerns for building a berm. The Committee suggested other factors to consider in the tilling design (e.g., create peaks and valleys to retain water, and till along shoreline contours to distribute flooding and utilize residing seed bank).

Imperial Irrigation District Activities

Jessica Lovecchio, IID, shared updates on IID dust control projects as part of its air quality program:

- Previous survey indicated 19,000 acres of Salton Sea is exposed playa. New surveys will occur at the end of December.
- IID projects are occurring on 1200 acres of IID property; projects include surface roughening and vegetation enhancement.
- Seeking proposals for wood chips for Whitewater River that is cost-effective and disease-free. Tamarisk is one option (because already locally prevalent).
- Selected contractor for its air station maintenance and operations.
- Testing different surfactant materials on a small area in New River.
- Installing a test groundwater well on USBR property near Salton City that, if water quality and supply is satisfactory, could help with surface roughening and vegetation enhancement.
- Planning to conduct wet cores samples in the sea in the ten-year horizon to determine what may become exposed and inform future project design.
- Early 2019: issuing IID's dust control plan for the 2018-19 season and emissions inventory.

IID has cost estimates for project construction (contact Jessica for cost details); maintenance and monitoring costs are unknown. All projects are proactive to avoid regulatory action; therefore IID is conducting frequent monitoring to address issues before they become major problems.

The Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) environmental mitigation work requires dust control, restrict access, emission credits, and monitoring. In addition to the dust control and monitoring, IID set up and maintains gates and signs to restrict access. IID has not yet considered emission credits; IID would still need to mitigate dust emissive areas.

A representative from FIELD cautioned that wood chips may have emissive particulate issues to consider. Torres Martinez area may have tamarisk available through its tree planting program.

An attendee asked if the air regulatory or management agencies have shared concerns about the increase in exposed playa. Agency staff responded that local air districts and CA Air Resources Board have been very cooperative to date as the SSMP proactively pursues dust suppression projects.

Next Steps

Genevieve Johnson, USBR, may join the SSMP coordination meetings to facilitate ongoing dialog.

The state, IID, and BLM will continue to consider the pros and cons for and alternatives to Parcel 10 surfacing roughening as an interim measure before habitat enhancement in the SCH project area.

Monitoring Efforts: Fish and Avian

Refer to [CDFW wildlife monitoring presentation slides](#).

At the June meeting, the Committee reviewed public health and air quality monitoring; CDFW presented a related but different aspect of monitoring focused on wildlife. Recent monitoring data for desert pupfish, tilapia, and piscivorous birds (pelicans and cormorants) indicate increased salinity and reduced freshwater flow may be indirectly reducing the fish community, and therefore also the piscivorous bird population. Pupfish are doing relatively well, but their natural habitats are diminishing. The tilapia population might increase if this year's juveniles survive the winter. CDFW will continue its fish and avian monitoring and has been working with partners such as the Audubon to coordinate avian surveying.

Discussion included the following:

- CDFW monitoring frequency primarily depends on site access and available resources. CDFW researchers noted that access to launch sites have become more challenging, particularly in the north (Varner Harbor is no longer accessible).
- Corixid (water boatman) abundance increased dramatically starting in 2017. The cause and implications remain uncertain.
- Dabbling ducks and invertebrate-eating birds seem to be doing well. Diving ducks populations have decreased.
- More piscivorous birds have been seen at neighboring freshwater bodies.

Potential State Monitoring Program of Fish and Birds

The Committee briefly discussed establishing a state monitoring program for fish and birds. The 2013 Monitoring and Assessment Plan (MAP) outlines current monitoring protocols, but the group was not certain if those protocols will be sufficient to the sea's rapidly changing environment and how to measure success of the habitat. There was support for monitoring lower trophic levels as well. CDFW is working on a MAP implementation plan to serve as a starting point for comprehensive monitoring across the Salton Sea shoreline, proper, and monitoring habitat enhancement.

The Committee suggested the Science Committee discuss the prospect of a wildlife monitoring program in greater depth and report back to the 10-Year Committee. (Note: this is monitoring topics is separate from the already existent and ongoing public health and air quality monitoring.)

Next Steps

The Science Committee will discuss a potential state wildlife monitoring program to complement other monitoring (e.g., public health), and provide recommendations to the 10-Year Committee.

General SSMP Implementation Comments / Considerations

- Get projects on the ground as soon as possible, which will help catalyze public interest and engagement.
- Human health (air quality) is the SSMP's top priority. Ecosystem health is also a high priority and closely related to public health. Recreational values and economic benefits are also related and valued, although more difficult to incorporate into project design (therefore, looking to the Engagement Committee for guidance).
- The group needs to remain cognizant to the Colorado River drought contingency planning, where Imperial Valley may be asked to put 200,000 acre feet of water into Lake Mead annually, that could indirectly lead to the Salton Sea levels decreasing even faster.

Joint 10-Year Plan Committee and Engagement Committee Meeting:

The 10-Year Plan Committee and the Engagement Committee held a joint discussion on SSMP project planning updates and opportunities to improve engagement. Project updates are summarized below; refer to the [Engagement Committee meeting summary](#) for discussion on improving community outreach, education, and engagement.

SSMP Project / Planning Updates

Alcott Wetlands

DWR and IID are collaborating with geothermal company Controlled Thermal Resources (CTR) on a wetland habitat project spanning approximately 380 acres on a hot field for geothermal activity owned by CTR. The project aims to use CTR's planned site development and operations (e.g., a levee that CTR already plans to build on the site) as a multi-beneficial opportunity to achieve several ecosystem benefits, including tamarisk reduction, rail wetland habitat, and pupfish refugia habitat in nearby drains. Modeling is currently underway, and DWR estimates it will take 1-2 years to complete permitting and design.

This project aligns with the overall planning strategy to use the existing water around the Salton Sea to either mitigate dust and/or help with habitat. This can also create opportunities in the future to further enhance or create more habitat for species. If successful, this strategy potentially may be replicated elsewhere in the Salton Sea to provide important satellite habitat with the currently available water.

North Lake / Whitewater

The state has been working with TetraTech to explore several project conceptual designs and assess cost and feasibility of options. The North Lake project would provide habitat to key fish and bird species and create water supply pond(s) for future habitat and dust mitigation projects. One of the options included creating two headwater ponds that would feed into shallower habitat at certain elevations, and include a channel in the middle for flood passage. Other alternative designs are in development based on community and stakeholder feedback. The state expects to release a report sometime in 2019. The report will likely not present a "Preferred Alternative"; rather, it will have a suite of different configurations with the cost estimations and other associated considerations.

Discussion

Participants discussed flow impacts and flow reliability. Storm flows rush through the area in a few days, much of which cannot be stored. Participants raised concerns that a large proportion of the

average flows come from three waste water treatment plants that aim to recycle that water in the future, bringing the reliable flows down to about 20,000 acre-feet per year. There could be a way to drain water into North lake without jeopardizing desert pupfish.

The group briefly discussed the connection to the Perimeter Lake proposal. A participant stated the Perimeter Lake in concept would allow for more water to be coming from the southern end. Therefore, the North Lake design would be set at an elevation that aligns with the elevation needed for the Perimeter Lake. Salton Sea Authority (SSA) members have agreed on a common elevation to create the Perimeter Lake.

Other Committee comments included:

- SSA would like the project to have more recreation access and potential for economic development than what Alternative B currently provides.
- Consider including changes in groundwater contributions in the hydrologic modeling. In the future, also consider including other tributaries not accounted for in this initial model.
- Riverside County has an interest in a long-range plan that will cover the county line along the Salton Sea, recognizing it would need to be built in stages. Riverside County would like that concept to be considered in the North Lake SSMP report.
- The 29 Palms Band of Morongo Indians had submitted a comment regarding North Lake and the benefits to Salton Sea from receiving that water.

Species Conservation Habitat, including New River West

The SCH project combines planning for New River West, New River East, and New River Far East for a total of approximately 3,770 acres. This approach helps tap into available funding and better coordinate planning across the combined parcels. The state will work closely with parcel-property owners, contractors, and other stakeholders to ensure the next phase in planning and project design (New River West) aligns with completed designs (New River East) and future planning for the SCH.

Desert Shores

The state continues to work with the SSMP committees to explore opportunities for habitat, access, and dust coverage.

Other Project Updates

The state is modifying its environmental documents to take advantage of a CA Department of Safety of Dams exemption (e.g., allow the state to increase the dam height in the SCH project to be six feet higher and offer deeper water habitat).

Three proposals were chosen for the water import project and gave presentations at public workshops in the [north](#) and [south](#) end of the sea. The State is working with state legislators on next steps (e.g., engineering analysis of the projects).

Contacts

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